

Message Text

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ACTION AGR-08

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INFO USLO PEKING

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FOR AGRICULTURE, FAS, FCA, MEEKER AND NOVOTNY

FROM: AGRICULTURAL OFFICER

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, CH

SUBJECT: PRC GRAIN ESTIMATES: THE SOYBEAN QUESTION

REF: (A) HONG KONG 0627 (B) 75 HONG KONG 14689

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE GRAIN-SOYBEAN QUESTION (REFS A AND B) WAS DISCUSSED WITH PEKING CORRESPONDENT ROSS MUNRO WHO FIRST FILED STORY THAT SOYBEANS WERE INCLUDED IN 1974 FIGURE OF 275 MILLION METRIC TONS. MUNRO, AWARE OF RESULTANT DIFFERENCES OF OPINION, AGREED TO SEEK CONFIRMATION OF REPORT THROUGH APPROPRIATE OFFICIAL CHANNELS IN PEKING. END SUMMARY

1. ON FEBRUARY 18, DURING RECENT HONG KONG VISIT OF ROSS MUNRO, PEKING-BASED CORRESPONDENT OF TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL, AGRICULTURAL OFFICER DISCUSSED WITH HIM THE CHINESE GRAIN-SOYBEAN ESTIMATE QUESTION (REF A). MUNRO CLAIMED THAT HE WAS THE FIRST TO LEARN THAT "SOYBEANS WERE INCLUDED" IN THE NOW OFFICIALLY CLAIMED FIGURE OF 275 (LIT. 274.9) MILLION METRIC TONS (MMT) FOR CHINA'S 1974 TOTAL GRAIN PRODUCTION AND FILED THE STORY. MUNRO HAD LATER LEARNED THAT THERE WERE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AS TO WHETHER

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OR NOT SOYBEANS WERE INCLUDED IN THE FIGURE AND REVIEWED WITH

AGRICULTURAL OFFICER HOW HE OBTAINED THE INFORMATION HE REPORTED.

2. MUNRO STATED THAT HE AND A TANJUG (YUGOSLAV) REPORTER (ONLY TWO CORRESPONDENTS) CALLED ON CH'AN CH'UN, DESCRIBED AS A "RESPONSIBLE PERSON" AND "THE OFFICIAL IN CHARGE OF AGRICULTURE" IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY. THE INTERVIEW, WHICH HAD BEEN REQUESTED THROUGH OFFICIAL CHANNELS, WAS GRANTED 3-4 WEEKS AFTER MAXWELL WAS GIVEN THE 275-MMT PRODUCTION FIGURE FOR 1974 (I.E. PROBABLY AROUND MID-DECEMBER 1975). IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED EARLIER, CH'AN CH'UN TALKED FOR APPROXIMATELY 1 2/2 HOURS PRIMARILY ABOUT TACHAI BUT IN RESPONDING TO QUESTION FROM MUNRO, HE ALSO CONFIRMED THE VALIDITY OF THE 275-MMT FIGURE REPORTED FOR 1974.

3. UPON HEARING CONFIRMATION OF "THE MAXWELL FIGURE" OF 274.9 MMT, MUNRO EXPRESSED SKEPTICISM BECAUSE OF THE EARLIER-RELEASED ARITHMETIC THAT 1974 GRAIN PRODUCTION WAS 2.4 TIMES THAT OF 1949, WHICH MUNRO FELT INDICATED A HARVEST NO LARGER THAN 264 MMT. (THAT ARITHMETIC HAD BEEN EARLIER ANALYZED BY AGRICULTURAL OFFICE IN REFS A AND B.) ACCORDING TO MUNRO, MINAG OFFICIAL WAS CLEAR AND EMPHATIC IN STRESSING THAT ALTHOUGH 1949 FIGURE OF 110 MMT DID NOT INCLUDE SOYBEANS, THE 274.9-MMT FIGURE DID INCLUDE SOYBEANS. CH'AN WENT FURTHER IN STATING THAT SOYBEANS HAD BEEN INCLUDED IN CHINA'S GRAIN PRODUCTION FIGURES SINCE 1958. (THAT IS APPROXIMATELY THE TIME WHEN SOYBEANS CEASED BEING INCLUDED IN CHINA'S TOTAL GRAIN PRODUCTION STATISTICS, TO BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, AND THUS APPEARS IN DIRECT CONTRAST WITH INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO US.)

4. BECAUSE OF DIFFERENCES IN OPINION, WHICH HE BELIEVES RESULTED AT LEAST IN PART FROM HIS STORY, MUNRO AGREED TO REQUEST, THROUGH APPROPRIATE OFFICIAL CHANNELS, CONFIRMATION OF THE MINAG OFFICIAL'S STATEMENT CONCERNING SOYBEANS. AGRICULTURAL OFFICER REQUESTED THAT MUNRO (WHO RETURNED TO PEKING ON FEBRUARY 19) PASS ANY NEW INFORMATION ON TO NEELEY OR THOMAS AT USLO PEKING.

5. COMMENT: AGRICULTURAL OFFICER EMPORESSED WITH MUNRO AS APPARENTLY QUITE INTELLIGENT AND PROBABLY HIGHLY RELIABLE REPORTER, BUT REMAINS PUZZLED BY NATURE OF INFORMATION REPORTEDLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GIVEN BY MINAG OFFICAL. WE LOOK FORWARD TO CLARIFYING STATEMENT.

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